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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN SUDAN OPPOSITION PARTIES: CHANCES OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS ARE NIL

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Summary
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¶11. (U) During a gathering at ConGen Juba on 25 August, southern opposition parties declared the chances for free and fair elections in 2009 to be "non-existent" given the abbreviated period to prepare for and conduct elections, the inability of small parties to finance adequately their planned activities, and the ability of the NCP and SPLM to use public funds, security services, and the media to their advantage. One NCP and one SPLM representative also attended. The NCP representative denied allegations that his party had manipulated the electoral timeline so opposition parties would have insufficient time to prepare or that NCP leaders were using public funds to support their party's activities. The CG reminded all that the elections are a Sudanese process and the Sudanese people and parties must take ownership. He reaffirmed U.S. support for the elections as part of the CPA and expressed hope that the elections would indeed be free and fair. End summary

¶12. (U) On the evening of 25 August, the Consul General hosted southern opposition parties at ConGen Juba to discuss parties' impressions of the electoral law and party strategies going into the upcoming elections. Attending were members from the Sudan African National Union (SANU), the United Democratic Sudan Forum (UDSF), the United Democratic Front (UDF), and the United Sudan African Party (USAP I). One SPLM rep and one NCP (Southern Sector) rep also attended, further enlivening the discussion when sensitive issues were addressed.

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SPLM SHOULD IMPLEMENT POWER SHARING
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¶13. (U) The CG welcomed the party representatives, and asked for their opinions about the upcoming elections and their parties' relationships with the SPLM. Dr. Toby Maduot Parek Machar, the Chairman of SANU, began by lamenting the SPLM's failure to fully-implement its agreement with smaller southern parties to share positions in the GoSS and leadership positions in the southern states. "The SPLM has ignored us (i.e., small southern parties) for governorships, commissionerships, and advisory roles" within in the GoSS. Small southern parties are not even involved in lower-level leadership roles within the ten southern states, he continued. He urged the SPLM to review the power-sharing decisions it agreed to and allow other southern parties to participate in leadership and management of the south. Dr. Machar added that during this period of resettlement in the South, "we must build the spirit of peace," and it is the work of all parties to make this happen, not only the SPLM and the NCP.

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NCP ALLEGED MANIPULATION, LACK OF FUNDS
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¶14. (U) SANU Chairman Machar argued that southern parties need to

confer before the elections and adopt a unified vision. He said that lack of funding is the biggest obstacle to SANU's participation in the upcoming election. "How can we mobilize our people in ten months with no funds? We rely only on member contributions and do not have access to state funds such as the NCP and SPLM." Angelo Gwang Ding, Leader of the USAP Caucus in the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly (SSLA), seconded Machar's sentiments and bemoaned the fact that most southern opposition parties cannot even afford to set up state offices across most of the country. He added that the NCP and the SPLM control the nation's security forces, making it even harder for opposition parties to work freely.

15. (SBU) SANU member and GNU National Assembly representative Gabriel Matur Malek branded the NCP as "masters of deceit", particularly when it comes to manipulating international opinion. "The elections will not be free and fair," he declared. "They are just a chance for the NCP to re-group." He said that the electoral law is a work of the NCP, and opposition parties did not have an adequate chance to inform it. Northern opposition parties such as Umma and DUP are being "squeezed" to the point of non-existence, said Malek. Were the NCP to allow free and fair elections, it would disappear from power. The SPLM, said Malek, must reach out to all communities in order not to be voted out of power in the GoSS. "The SPLM is still enjoying its honeymoon period with the people of southern Sudan," he warned, "but the honeymoon is eroding over time."

TIGHT TIMELINE AND COMPLEX ELECTIONS

16. (SBU) Southern opposition party members in general are concerned about the tight elections timeline, particularly with no National

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Electoral Commission (NEC) yet in place. "When will there be time for civic and voter education?" they asked. People need to be empowered to vote; thus civic and voter education is very important, argued SANU rep Malek. "The situation we are in now with only a short time to prepare for and conduct elections," charged Malek, "and is a calculated and deliberate delay by the NCP. The chances of free and fair elections at this point in time," he reiterated, "are non-existent."

17. (U) Opposition party members emphasized the complexity of holding simultaneous elections for the Presidential, national assembly, SSLA, state assemblies, and governors. Due to this complexity, the elections "will not work," they insisted. Reps also expressed concern about logistical impediments to preparing for and conducting elections in the south.

THE NCP FIGHTS BACK

18. (SBU) After listening to opposition party representatives lambaste the NCP and SPLM for creating what they said is an unfair elections environment, NCP Southern Sector representative Christo John spoke up. "Everyone here is blaming the NCP and the SPLM for their situation." "The NCP is not using public funds to support its party activities," claimed John, to the sneers and snickers of those around him. The NCP, he said, uses only its member contributions to support the party. "Furthermore, all members of the National Assembly voted to pass the electoral law, not just the NCP," he said. "Elections will be fair," he emphasized.

19. (SBU) John had more to add, but opposition party members refused to let him continue. UDF rep and member of the SSLA Sebit Abbe said, "this guy, our southern friend, is being used by the NCP. Even he knows that the NCP gives little funding to its southern sector branch." Turning to John, SANU's Makel said, "You as a Southerner don't know what the NCP is all about." John tried again to finish his statements, but opposition party members continued to cut him off.

SUDANESE MUST TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR ELECTIONS

¶10. (U) After two hours of continuous, sometimes heated, exchanges between the party representatives and repeated requests for U.S. financial support, the CG reminded them that the elections are a Sudanese process, and the Sudanese people and parties must own them.

He noted that Sudan is only beginning its period of democratic transformation and that it will take time for the parties to develop, learn how to support themselves, and compete. Furthermore, he noted, it is inappropriate for the USG to select foreign parties and directly support them financially, in effect, taking sides in a Sudanese process. The U.S. can, and will, however, assist with the mechanics of organizing the election and with civic education programs. He reaffirmed U.S. support for the elections as part of the CPA and expressed hope that the elections would indeed be free and fair.

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COMMENT
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¶11. (SBU) None of the opposition parties' allegations and accusations are shocking, and their biggest concerns continue to be inadequate funding and lack of control over the security and media environment in which all parties must operate. It is no secret that the NCP and the SPLM both use public funds to support party activities. It is also well-known that the NCP employs a strategy of "divide and conquer" when it comes to splitting apart opposition parties in order to weaken its competition. Unfortunately, it also has been evident for some time that the SPLM is moving in the direction of making the South a one-party state, at least until after the 2011 referendum.

¶12. (SBU) Comment continued: What should be of considerable concern, however, is the looming electoral deadline (July 2009), the lack of a functioning NEC, and the inadequate preparation, including civic and voter education, to start the electoral ball rolling. The GoSS recently submitted a request for UNMIS electoral support (septel), which will begin to allow preparation to start in earnest in the south.

ASQUINO